

Remarks With Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari After Their Meeting

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Secretary of State

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SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, hello, everyone, and I'm delighted to be welcoming back to the State Department a colleague and a friend, someone who has served his country with great distinction. And I am very pleased to have this opportunity with Foreign Minister Zebari here to reaffirm the importance and strength of the long-term strategic relationship between the United States and Iraq.

I also, Minister, offer our sincere condolences for the loss of life suffered in recent attacks against religious pilgrims and security forces in Iraq. But I am confident that Iraqis will not be deterred from working together to build a new future of peace and security for all of their people.

This will be the second meeting of the Diplomatic Joint Coordinating Committee of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement. This committee guides our engagement on a wide range of diplomatic, cultural, economic, and security issues. It is the roadmap for our long-term partnership. The foreign minister is co-hosting the committee along with Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Jeff Feltman, and they are working on a range of common concerns, including Iraq's removal from UN Chapter 7 sanctions and other important matters that are of concern to Iraqis.

We also discussed the critical need for Iraq's political leaders to continue the hard work necessary to form a proportionate and inclusive government that represents the voices of Iraq's diverse communities and can deliver on the promise of democracy. More is needed from everyone involved. The United States expresses no preference for the outcome in the government formation, but we share a sense of urgency. The people of Iraq deserve to have a government that is ready to meet their needs, and we hope that that occurs soon.

The Iraqi security forces are growing in confidence and capability, which has been evident in the way that they've handled some of these recent attacks. As our Ambassador Chris Hill recently said, our soldiers may withdraw from Iraq, but our interests will remain. We are committed to this relationship, and after August 31st, 50,000 U.S. troops will remain in Iraq to train, equip, and advise Iraqi security forces, conduct joint counterterrorism missions, and protect ongoing U.S. and civilian military activities. We are working every day to create a very strong foundation for a long-lasting relationship between the United States and Iraq, and the reduction in troops in no way reflects a decrease in American engagement with Iraq or our commitment to the Iraqi people. Guided by the Strategic Framework Agreement, the

United States will continue to be an active partner and supporter as Iraqis strengthen their democracy, improve their security, and reintegrate fully into the regional and global community and economy.

We believe a sustained U.S. role will be crucial to lasting peace and security in Iraq. But ultimately, we recognize the long-term success of the Iraqi nation depends upon the leaders and people of Iraq. It is their determination and hard work that will make the difference. The strong turnout in the March 7th election underscored their resolve, but we know some delays have occurred on the road to forming a government, but we're betting on the Iraqis. We think the Iraqi people are a tough, resilient, determined people who are more than up to the task. And the United States will stand with the Iraqi people for the long term.

So again, Minister Zebari, thank you for your visit, thank you for your friendship and cooperation, and I look forward to continuing to work with you.

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Secretary. It's always an honor and pleasure to see you, whether here in Washington or in Iraq. I am here with my delegation, in fact, as Madam Secretary indicated, to convene the second session of the Joint Coordination Committee for Political and Diplomatic Cooperation. This is a message to all the people of Iraq, to the region, that our long-term relationship is there and it will flourish, it will be strengthened; it has nothing to do with the drawdown of U.S. troops by August 31st. I think this long-term strategic friendship and cooperation has been enshrined in an agreement which is to the benefit of the people and of the region's people of some stability.

In fact, we come from New York and we had good discussions with the secretary general, with a number of the permanent Security Councils, the P-5, in order to discuss means and ways for Iraq to get out of Chapter 7 regulation. And here, Madam Secretary, I want to thank you and the U.S. Government for all the help and the assistance you have given us, in fact, to get Iraq back to its rightful place in the community of nations.

And we are making progress on a number of issues. We discussed, as you know, the efforts – the current efforts of government formation. And this is an Iraqi issue and the people of Iraq, the Iraqi leaders, in fact, face this challenge to form their own representative government based on the outcome of March the 7 historic elections. Now we have some delays. Eventually, I think a government will emerge and we are doing our best, in fact, to do that in order to avoid any constitutional governmental vacuum. I think that people are aware of the urgency. As you have, we as Iraqi also feel a sense of urgency. But we are confident we will overcome and we will form our next government.

And once again, thank you very much for hosting us and it's a pleasure to see you. Thank you.

MODERATOR: We have time for two questions. Elise Labott from CNN.

QUESTION: Thank you. Madam Secretary, on the Iranian scientist, Mr. Amiri, he's – your spokesman has said that he was here on his own free will, but he has informed the government that he wants to return

to Iran. Was his defection mismanaged in any way by the U.S. Government and are you now worried that he's returning to Iran – are you worried about the safety of him and his family?

And Mr. Foreign Minister, welcome back to Washington. There's reports of hundreds of millions of Iraqi crude oil leaving Iraq illegally through Kurdistan smuggled into Iran against – in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. How do you explain that and what is the Iraqi Government doing to combat it? Thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, first let me say that Mr. Amiri has been in the United States of his own free will and he is free to go. In fact, he was scheduled to travel to Iran yesterday but was unable to make all of the necessary arrangements to reach Iran through transit countries.

In contrast, Iran continues to hold three young Americans against their will and we reiterate our request that they be released and allowed to return to their families on a humanitarian basis. And we also continue to have no information the welfare and whereabouts of Robert Levinson, who has been missing in Iran since 2007. We continue to request Iranian cooperation in resolving this matter and in ensuring his safe return to the United States.

QUESTION: Are you worried about (inaudible)?

SECRETARY CLINTON: He's free to go. He was free to come. These decisions are his alone to make.

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: Well, Iraq, as I've said earlier, we are trying to get out of Chapter 7 and to free Iraq from all these obligations and so on. So Iraq will definitely – will abide by Security Council resolutions in order to be a responsible member of the community of nations. This oil trade with Iran, as you mention – in fact, the government is looking into that with Kurdish Regional Government authorities. And at the moment, in fact, it's not at a large scale as has been portrayed. The recent sanctions are new, the last package (inaudible) on Iran. But definitely, we are looking into that. And it seems that there is some trade going on across the border, but the government is looking at that and is in close consultation with the KRG authorities, in fact, to find a solution to that.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY CLINTON: She'll translate.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) This is Nihad Ali from Al Iraqiya Channel, and the first question goes to the foreign minister of Iraq. Mr. Foreign Minister, you met yesterday with the secretary general of the United Nations as well as the ambassadors of the various member countries of the Security Council. You – did you – what is – is there a ceiling, a timeline ceiling, for taking Iraq out of Chapter 7? As well, did you discuss the crisis of the formation of the Iraqi Government?

The second question goes to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Despite the visit, the recent visit of Vice President Biden to Iraq, until now there are no signs that Iraq is going out of its crisis pertaining to the

formation of the government. Did you discuss with Foreign Minister Zebari any suggestions about this issue?

FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI: (Via interpreter) Welcome to you. And yes, we met with the Secretary General of the United Nations Mr. Ban Ki-moon as well as the ambassadors of the five permanent countries, members of the Security Council. We discussed the ways and the means of – and other measures that the Iraqi Government has been undertaking in order to take out Iraq from the provisions as well as the repercussions of Chapter 7. And in the past year, we have achieved a lot of progress, mainly pertaining to ridding Iraq of weapons or at the issue – about the issue pertaining to the weapons of mass destruction, as well as issues pertaining to the remaining contracts related to the Oil-for-Food and also issues pertaining to our relationship with our brother country Kuwait. Therefore, we are building on all what you have been achieving over the past year and we will continue to do so.

SECRETARY CLINTON: We discussed at great length the status of government formation. I reiterated that the United States does not have any preference in the outcome as to who is awarded what position, but we are concerned by the delay. We think that there needs to be more of a sense of urgency to resolve this matter.

I watched with interest as the people of Iraq demonstrated over the lack of electricity in the very hot weather that they are suffering through. And it takes a government to solve such problems. So we urge the leaders of Iraq to reach an agreement and to put their personal interests behind the national interest. And therefore, anything the United States can do, we stand ready to do, in order to encourage the government formation as soon as possible.

INTERPRETER: We have discussed the issue of the – (laughter).

SECRETARY CLINTON: I am so impressed with her, I don't – I could barely speak one language.

INTERPRETER: Thank you, Madam Secretary.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you all very much.